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UTAH FAITH

Smart controllers shave water use at Latter-day Saint meetinghouses

Church saves nearly 42 million gallons of water with technology

By Amy Joi O'Donoghue | @Amyjoi16 | Sep 28, 2019, 2:38pm MDT

The bulk purchase and installation of more than 180 smart water controllers saved water use at area ward meetinghouses and seminary buildings owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a program officials predict will pay for itself later this year. | Deseret News archives

SALT LAKE CITY — The bulk purchase and installation of more than 180 smart water controllers saved water use at area ward meetinghouses and seminary buildings owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a program officials predict will pay for itself later this year.

David Wright, the church's landscape architect in the meetinghouse facilities department, said water consumption at the 182 locations where the smart controllers were installed dropped by as much as 27%, saving nearly 42 million gallons of water in a year's time.

The controllers apply outdoor water based on multiple indicators that include humidity, wind speed and the amount of sunlight at any given time.

“They adjust the volume of water based on the weather evaluation and need,” Wright said.

He added the savings was anywhere between 14% and 23%, and when accounting for the heat last year, jumped as high as 27%.

That water savings looking at year-over-year water use in 2017 and last year — the controllers’ first year of operation — could be duplicated this year, Wright said.

“If things are as good this year as last year, if we stick with that 20% number, the controllers will pay for themselves this year.”

The church participated in a water conservation program offered to institutions and commercial entities by the Central Utah Water Conservancy District.

Under the program, the district will cover up to $1,500 of the costs of an individual controller, which can run around $3,000 a piece.

The church negotiated a bulk purchase price with a supplier, similar to a move last year by the University of Utah in which new smart water controllers were projected to save 90 million gallons of water a year.

Rick Maloy, the district’s water conservation manager, said the self-funded program draws between 300 and 500 participating entities each year and is popular among property managers in charge of apartment complexes and large institutions eyeing a way to be more conscious of water conservation.

The city of Sandy, for example, is looking to install the smart controllers in its parks.

“The water savings we see through commercial programs are a lot higher than residential,” he said.

Wright, who has oversight of landscape plans at church facilities across the United States and Canada, said he is encouraged by the results so far, and where possible hopes to have them installed in new construction.

“I personally have been pretty happy with the smart controllers,” he said. “If you can get a willing contractor involved, you can be very successful with them.”